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OLD CELTIC TABOOS

BY ALEXANDER H. KRAPPE

Natio est omnis Gallorum admodum dedita religionibus

THE chief source of our knowledge of the religion of the Ancient Celts is the brief account we find in Julius Caesar's work on his conquest of Gaul. Against its trustworthiness it has sometimes been urged that the writer was ill prepared to deal fairly and adequately with the subject, inasmuch as he was a general and a statesman rather than an ethnographer or a folklorist.¹ The critics who have advanced this view have failed to take into consideration a long unnoticed trait in Caesar's character, to wit, the interest he appears to have taken in the antiquarian aspects of religion, obsolete rites and ceremonies so numerous in his own religion, a trait to which attention was drawn first by the late W. Warde Fowler.² This interest explains the special prominence given to the Gaulish religion in a work largely devoted to politics and strategy; it also confers an exceptional value on Caesar's testimony with reference to certain Celtic taboos noticed by him in Gaul and Britain.

I

Speaking of the inhabitants of Britain, Caesar (V, 12) makes the following statement:

Leporem et gallinam et anserem gustare fas non putant; haec tamen alunt animi voluptatisque causa.

This simple text has given rise to almost as many controversies as the number of words of which it is composed. Taken at its face value, it merely means that hares, chickens, and geese were considered forbidden food by the ancient Britons,³ who did keep these animals, however, for pastime and pleasure. Caesar's silence permits the inference that the Gauls of the continent did not abstain from these foods.⁴

The question whether we are dealing with a genuine food taboo, comparable, for example, with the prohibition of pork enjoined upon the

¹ Cf., for example, E. Hull, *Folk-Lore*, XVIII (1907), p. 141.

² W. Warde Fowler, *Roman Essays and Interpretations*, Oxford, 1920, pp. 138 ff.

³ Curiously enough, that truthful traveller known as Sir John Mandeville (*Voyages and Travels*, New York, 1898, p. 183) speaks of an isle in the East Indies where "they will not, for anything, eat flesh of hares, or of hens, or of geese, and yet they breed enough to see them and to behold them only; but they eat flesh of all other beasts, and drink milk."

⁴ From Pliny (*N.H.* X, 53) we know that in what is to-day Picardy and Flanders large flocks of geese were kept—for the Roman market.

Jews by the Mosaic legislation, was answered in the affirmative by Salomon Reinach,⁵ and it must be admitted that the words *fas non putant* of Caesar's text leave no other alternative. But Salomon Reinach went considerably beyond the known facts when he interpreted the words *animi voluptatisque causa* as an example of Caesar's *naïveté* in attributing without much ado to the "savages" of Britain the custom of civilized peoples (such as the Romans) of keeping household pets.⁶ Accordingly the French scholar thought he could detect a religious motive behind the British custom, and he believed that the most likely explanation had to be sought in totemic institutions.

Leaving aside the question whether, even if not eaten, chickens and geese may not be kept for their eggs,⁷ let us note that Reinach was quite mistaken in his assumption that the keeping of pets is peculiar to civilization. It most certainly is not but common alike to savage, barbarian and civilized man.⁸ Thus Karl von den Steinen found that Indian villages in the interior of Brazil have whole *ménageries* on a small scale: all sorts of animals are caught and kept in simple cages, and the natives enjoy watching the captives, which they care for and feed. Also their women breed fowl and other domestic animals in their cottages; but they never eat them, much less kill them.⁹ Certain Australian black-fellows catch snakes, pull out their teeth or sew up their mouths, and keep them as pets. In Samoa pigeons are carefully kept and fed by certain clans. Amongst the Kalang of Java red dogs were tamed and protected from ill usage. These customs may be, as has been suggested, connected with totemic beliefs and practices;¹⁰ but just as frequently they are not. Even the pigs kept in the South Sea islands (whither they had been brought by the Spaniards) were largely regarded and treated as household pets.¹¹ Thus there is no reason to doubt the essential truth of Caesar's statement: the Britons may very well have kept these animals for their pleasure, as household pets.

⁵ *Cultes, Mythes et Religions*, I (1922), pp. 31 ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ It is noteworthy that the Indians of Brazil observed by von den Steinen do not eat the eggs of their chickens.

⁸ E. Hann, *Die Haustiere und ihre Beziehungen zur Wirtschaft des Menschen*, Leipzig, 1896, pp. 28 ff., 34, 36, 306; *Demeter und Baubo*, Lübeck [1896], p. 16; *Die Entstehung der Pflugkultur*, Heidelberg, 1909, pp. 59 f.; Karl Bücher, *Die Entstehung der Volkswirtschaft*, II (Tübingen, 1918), p. 65; O. Leroy, *Essai d'introduction critique à l'étude de l'économie primitive*, Paris, 1925, pp. 96 f.

⁹ K. von den Steinen, *Unter den Naturvölkern Zentral-Brasiiliens*, Berlin, 1894, pp. 210, 218, 379; cf. also O. Peschel, *Abhandlungen zur Erd- und Völkerkunde*, Leipzig, 1877, p. 417.

¹⁰ Grant Allen, *The Evolution of the Idea of God*, London, 1901, p. 175.

¹¹ Bücher, *op. cit.*, I (1919), p. 52.

Looking at the fowls mentioned as domestic animals, we note first that there is a large interval between the probable dates of their domestication. The chicken is a bird of Indian origin and was first domesticated in India, whence it was introduced into Persia and diffused widely over the monarchy of the early Achamenids. It appears to have reached Greece in the course of the sixth century before our era and from the Balkans to have spread among the barbarians of the Danube valley.¹²

So we are led to enquire into the character of the bird in the land of its origin. There we find that in Manu's law code chicken was tabooed food.¹³ In Persia the rooster was the holy bird of Ahuramazda.¹⁴ In Greece the mystae of Eleusis abstained from chicken, which was held sacred to the goddesses.¹⁵ These facts would seem to go far to prove that the Celts had taken over the taboo with the fowl, a conclusion drawn long ago by Victor Hehn.¹⁶ We are therefore not dealing with a Celtic taboo as such but with a piece of Oriental belief or superstition, of which the more civilized continental Celts doubtless succeeded in ridding themselves much earlier than the insular Celts.

The ease with which such taboos are taken over from neighbouring tribes is well illustrated by the abstention from pork observed, according to Pausanias (VII, 17. 10), by the Galatians of Pessinus. In view of the fact, well known from the Irish sagas and from Varro,¹⁷ that the Western Celts were very fond of pork and even raised large herds of pigs for export, it stands to reason that the taboo in question was not Celtic but taken over by the Galatians from the peoples of Syrian stock who, like the Jews, held the pig in abomination.¹⁸

Before discussing the more difficult problem of the taboo of goose meat among the Britons, let us turn to the third of the animal species mentioned by Caesar, the hare.¹⁹

There can be no doubt as to the correctness of Caesar's statement: as late as the nineteenth century the peasants of Western Brittany could

¹² V. Hehn, *Kulturpflanzen und Haustiere*, Berlin, 1911, pp. 326 ff.

¹³ C. Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, I (Leipzig, 1866), p. 347.

¹⁴ Hehn, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

¹⁵ Porphy. *de abst.* IV, 16.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 337.

¹⁷ *De re rust.* II, 5. 4.

¹⁸ L. Diefenbach, *Origines Europaea*, Frankfurt a.M., 1861, p. 182. Early in the seventeenth century there was a deep-rooted aversion against pork in Scotland (Dalyell's *Darker Superstitions of Scotland*, p. 425, quoted by Sir G. L. Gomme, *Archaeological Review*, III (1889), p. 232). It is possible that this was due to the influence of the Mosaic code on Presbyterianism.

¹⁹ Cf. W. G. Black, "The Hare in Folk-Lore," *Folk-Lore Journal*, I (1883), pp. 84-90; A. Lang, "Le lièvre dans la mythologie," *Mélusine*, III (1886-87), col. 265-69.

hardly endure to hear the name of the animal. In parts of Wales hares were not killed down to the reign of Queen Victoria; in the S.W. parts of England the peasants, as late as the last century, would eat neither hare nor rabbit.²⁰ The peasants of Kerry, Ireland, are even now said to abstain from hare, whatever the reason alleged.²¹

This food taboo, again, is not peculiarly Celtic. At the beginning of the last century the peasants of Holstein were known to observe it.²² Hare is not eaten to this day in large parts of European Russia.²³ Even the mention of the rodent's name was forbidden in the Baltic provinces.²⁴ The taboo of hare flesh extended as far south as the Caucasus,²⁵ into the Turkish Empire and into the Near East generally.²⁶ In parts of Albania it is considered a sin to kill a hare or even to touch one that is dead.²⁷ The taboo is observed alike by the Mohammedan Persians and the Christian Armenians.²⁸ It forms part of the Mosaic legislation,²⁹ and has been known in India and China since the dawn of history.³⁰ Amongst the Koranas boys are taught not to steal, not to jeer at the weak and unfortunate, not to drink the milk of goat or sheep, and not to eat the flesh of jackal or hare.³¹ In Africa many Somali abstain from hare flesh, and it is considered to bring bad luck to kill a hare.³² The Namaquas will not eat the animal because, according to a widespread story, it brought them a message of death.³³ Finally, the existence of the same taboo among the Moors of Spain is brought out rather pertly by one of Bacon's Apophthegms: There was a cowardly Spanish soldier who on one occasion was among the first to run from the battle-field. When his absence was noticed, someone conjectured that he had been slain, where-

²⁰ Gomme, *loc. cit.*, p. 233.

²¹ C. Elton, *Origins of English History*, London, 1882, p. 297; A. C. Haddon, *Folk-Lore*, IV (1893), p. 352. ²² *Das Ausland*, LXIV (1891), p. 58.

²³ Bertram, *Jenseits der Scheeren*, Leipzig, 1854, p. 67.

²⁴ C. Russwurm, *Eibofolke*, Reval, 1855, p. 358; J. B. Holzmayer, *Osiliiana (Verh. d. Gel. Estn. Ges. in Dorpat)*, VII (2), Dorpat, 1872, p. 105.

²⁵ A. v. Haxthausen, *Transkaukasia*, Leipzig, 1856, II, 82; F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, Oxford, 1929, I, 243.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 240 ff.; S. Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, London, 1860, p. 191; René Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nosairis*, Paris, 1900, p. 93.

²⁷ G. F. Abbott, *Macedonian Folklore*, Cambridge, 1903, p. 106.

²⁸ Hasluck, *op. cit.*, I, 243. ²⁹ *Lev. xi*, 6 and 8.

³⁰ *Das Ausland*, LXIV, 58; Black, *loc. cit.*, p. 89; N. B. Dennys, *The Folk-Lore of China*, London, 1876, p. 64.

³¹ A. Bastian, *Die Völker des östlichen Asien*, Jena, 1866–71, V, 291.

³² Th. Waitz, *Anthropologie der Naturvölker*, II (1860), p. 520; *Folk-Lore*, VII (1889), p. 23; Frazer, *Anthologia anthropologica. The Native Races of Africa and Madagascar*, London, 1938, p. 494.

³³ C. J. Andersson, *Lake Ngami*, New York, 1857, p. 254.

upon another remarked : " He is certainly alive, for the Moors eat no hare's flesh." ³⁴

Now it is quite true, as Sir James G. Frazer suggested, that in some instances this taboo may have been due to a piece of primitive logic ; to the fear, that is, that eating of hare would make the eater faint-hearted ; ³⁵ but this explanation will not cover all, or even most, of the instances cited. We know, for example, that the Estonians abstain from hare because they are frankly afraid of the animal.³⁶ Some other explanation must therefore be sought.

One of the most universal and hence one of the oldest beliefs is the notion that the hare is somehow connected with the moon.³⁷ Thus in India the hare is the lunar animal *par excellence*, and whoever disturbs or hurts the animal by implication offends the moon. In the *Panchatantra* (III, 1) a hare presents himself before the king of the elephants who had destroyed the nests of these rodents in that region, with the declaration that he is a messenger of the Moon, whom the elephants have offended by their action, and he demands reparation and the retreat of the elephants. Strangely enough, the elephant king is impressed and thinks it best to obey.³⁸ Sometimes the hare is outright identified with the moon, and the story of Buddha, who placed the hare in the heavenly body as a reward for the animal's self-sacrifice, is well known.³⁹ But the connection of the moon with the hare is much older than Buddha. In Ancient Egypt the hare in the moon was Osiris in person. All over Africa the hare is represented as a messenger of the Moon,⁴⁰ and a similar notion appears to be current in Mongolia, to judge from a badly garbled folk-tale of that country.⁴¹ In the North American continent the rabbit plays an analogous part. Thus among the Algonquin and other Indian tribes the Great Hare was the moon in person.⁴² The Sioux and the

³⁴ Francis Bacon, *The Essays*, A. L. Burt Co., n.d., p. 397.

³⁵ Dudley Kidd, *The Essential Kafir*, London, 1904, p. 142 ; E. Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, London, 1912-17, II, 333.

³⁶ J. W. Boecler, *Der einfältigen Esthen abergläubische Gebräuche, Weisen und Gewohnheiten* (*Script. rev. Livon.*, II), Riga u. Leipzig, 1848, p. 678.

³⁷ E. Lefébure, " Le lièvre dans la mythologie," *Mélusine*, VIII (1896-97), col. 25-29 ; *Bibliothèque égyptologique*, XXXV (2), (1912), pp. 479-87 ; R. Briffault, *The Mothers*, London, 1927, II, 615 ff.

³⁸ Th. Benfey, *Pantschatantra*, Leipzig, 1859, II, 226 ff.

³⁹ Briffault, *op. cit.*, II, 615 ; E. Lüders, *Buddhistische Märchen aus dem alten Indien*, Jena, 1921, pp. 23 and 323 ; Bastian, *op. cit.*, II, 144 ; III, 242 ; V, 480 ; Black, p. 88 ; and my book *La Genèse des Mythes*, Paris, 1938, pp. 246-48.

⁴⁰ Sir James G. Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament*, London, 1918, I, 52 ff.

⁴¹ *Folk-Lore Journal*, IV (1886), pp. 27 f.

⁴² Paul Ehrenreich, *Die allgemeine Mythologie*, Leipzig, 1910, pp. 147, 185, 244, 246.

Indians of British Columbia see a rabbit in the moon.⁴³ In Ancient Mexico the gods transferred the hare to the moon,⁴⁴ and the Indians of New Mexico still see a rabbit in the heavenly body.⁴⁵ Returning to Europe we find that the ancient Teutonic goddess Holda is accompanied by a train of hares who act as torch-bearers.⁴⁶

These facts would seem to indicate some connection between the widespread aversion to or avoidance of the hare and the well-nigh universal association of the rodent with the moon. The exact chain of reasoning leading from the one to the other is less obvious to the modern mind; but we are probably right in assuming that the lunar association of the hare made the shy animal "uncanny" in the eyes of primitive folk, hence the taboo.

We are now somewhat better prepared to tackle the problem of the British goose taboo, which appears to have lingered on in parts of Lancashire and in S.W. England until the last century.⁴⁷ The domestication of the goose is far older than that of the chicken, at least in Europe and in the Near East, going back into prehistoric times.⁴⁸ Now it is worth noting that the bird appears to be connected with female divinities of lunar origin or lunar aspect, such as the Egyptian Isis, the Italian Juno, and the Teutonic Holda—witness the latter's *alter ego*, the *Reine Pedauque*.⁴⁹ There is also reason to believe that Leda, the mother of Helen, was a goose; but Helen herself is known to have been an ancient moon goddess.⁵⁰ Lastly, the goose, like the hare, was connected with mediaeval witches. We shall therefore not be far wrong in suspecting that the goose was sacred because of its fancied connection with the moon.

To these three food taboos expressly mentioned by Caesar should be added a fourth, common to all Celts as well as to Greeks and Romans and hence not especially noticed by the conqueror: the aversion to

⁴³ L. L. Meeker, *Journal of American Folklore*, XIV (1901), p. 163; J. Teit, *Traditions of the Thompson River Indians of British Columbia*, Boston, 1898, p. 91.

⁴⁴ B. de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España*, Mexico, 1829, II, 219; E. Seler, *Zeitschrift f. Ethnologie*, XXXIX (1907), p. 13.

⁴⁵ Ehrenreich, *ibid.*, XXXVIII (1906), p. 570.

⁴⁶ W. Mannhardt, *Wald- und Feldkulte*, Berlin, 1904–1905, I, 409 f.; cf. *Zeitschrift f. deutsche Mythologie und Sittenkunde*, III (1855), p. 85.

⁴⁷ Gomme, *loc. cit.*, p. 252 f.

⁴⁸ Hehn, *op. cit.*, p. 371; Hahn, *Demeter*, pp. 41 f.

⁴⁹ To quote Gustav Freytag (*Bilder aus der deutschen Vergangenheit*, I¹³ (Leipzig, 1881), p. 474: "The goose is the holy bird which in heathen times flew in front of the great earth mother, Berchta."

⁵⁰ Cf. Roscher's *Ausführliches Lexikon*, I (2), col. 1977.

horse flesh.⁵¹ The existence of this aversion was inferred, no doubt correctly, from an episode of the Gallic War.⁵² In his last struggle with the invaders Vercingetorix sent away his cavalry just before the iron circle of the besieging host closed in upon him at Alesia.⁵³ But it is clear that had there been no aversion of a religious nature against the eating of horse flesh the Gaulish leader would have kept the horses as a valuable addition to his food supply.⁵⁴

Lastly, mention should be made, for the sake of completeness, of a fish taboo referred to by Dio Cassius (LXXVI, 12) in his description of the tribes of Northern Britain. Fish taboos are widespread over the inhabited globe.⁵⁵ Varro states that the inhabitants of Lydia abstained from fish.⁵⁶ The Syrians associated the fish with their great goddess. In Homer a fish is sacred,⁵⁷ and Plato points out that during a campaign the Homeric warriors never ate fish.⁵⁸ Even in time of peace the men of Homer's day only ate fish when reduced to the verge of starvation. Nor do the Hindoos of Vedic times appear to have eaten fish.⁵⁹ Sir James Frazer was therefore probably right in concluding that we are dealing with an ancient Aryan taboo.⁶⁰ The reason must be sought, as was pointed out by E. Fehrle,⁶¹ in a certain demonic character inherent in fish, according to primitive thought, but also, probably, in the abundance of game, which makes a fish diet quite unnecessary.

II

In the sixth book of his work, after speaking of the Gaulish system of time-reckoning, Caesar continues thus (c. 18) :

In reliquis vitae institutis hoc fere ab reliquis differunt quod suos liberos, nisi cum adoleverint, ut munus militiae sustinere possint, palam

⁵¹ Reinach, III, 128.

⁵² VII, 71.

⁵³ There is a striking analogue in the *Olafssaga Tryggvasonar*, c. 70 : In 974 the Emperor Otto II had invaded Slesvig, but the Danes had laid waste the country all around, so that the invading host was soon threatened with a serious food shortage. The emperor called an assembly, in which it was pointed out that there were two courses open : to abandon the enterprise and go home or else to kill their horses and live on them. Otto objected to the second course being followed on the ground that it was contrary to the tenets of the Christian religion.

⁵⁴ Cf. on the whole question Reinach, III, 124-40.

⁵⁵ Cf. E. Fehrle, *Die kultische Keuschheit im Altertum*, Giessen, 1910, p. 46, n. 3 ; R. Eisler, *Orpheus—the Fisher*, London, 1921, pp. 20 ff. ; Westermarck, *op. cit.*, II, 324 f. This taboo, too, seems to have survived down into the middle ages, for in Ireland and some Highland districts the Saxons were disliked for their practice of catching and eating fish ; cf. Elton, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

⁵⁶ Varro, *de re rustica*, III, 17.

⁵⁷ *Iliad XVI*, 407.

⁵⁸ *Rep.* 404 B.

⁵⁹ H. Zimmer, *Altindisches Leben*, Berlin, 1879, p. 271.

⁶⁰ *Garnered Sheaves*, London, 1931, p. 90.

⁶¹ *Op. et loc. cit.*

ad se adire non patiuntur, filiumque puerili aetate in publico, in conspectu patris adsistere turpe ducunt.

Expressed in English this text evidently means that, in Caesar's opinion, the main difference between the Gauls and the rest of mankind lay in the fact that the former did not allow their minor sons to approach them in public, i.e. in popular assemblies or at what would now be called military reviews preparatory to the setting out of the armed host.

Since this custom, being of a purely negative character, was not easy to observe for a stranger, unless his attention was deliberately drawn to it, Salomon Reinach⁶² was probably right in assuming a written source or other second-hand information.

There is no need to discuss in detail the absurd theories put forward to explain this prohibition. Thus, according to some, it is evidence of the—entirely hypothetical—sacrifice of the first-born among the Celts, on the ground that the mothers must have hidden their children for fear lest they should be sacrificed.⁶³

The question arises whether Caesar was right in saying that this taboo (for such it apparently was) constituted a difference between the Gauls and the *rest of mankind*—unless we are satisfied to assume with Caesar that the Romans and Greeks constituted the “rest of mankind.”

As is well known, among so-called primitive races the age of puberty of both sexes is sharply marked off from the age of boyhood and girlhood, as a rule by some “threshold rite” or even a series of such (initiation ceremonies) in the course of which the young men are frequently subjected to endurance tests of various kinds. Until this time all children are held ceremonially impure.⁶⁴ It is needless to add that this term by no means implies a moral judgment of any kind. To put it in the words of Lévy-Bruhl,⁶⁵ “When the Cafirs say that children are impure, there is no moral judgment involved. This ‘impurity’ is analogous to that of people in mourning, of warriors after the killing of enemies in battle, and of women in childbed. It consists of a certain state of weakness, of danger, from which they can be released only by initiation. It excuses them from the food taboos to which adults are subject.” And again: “So long as the mandatory ceremonies have not taken place which give them a full share in tribal life, children are only imperfect members of the tribe; unlike adults, they do not enjoy consubstantiality with the

⁶² *Op. cit.*, III, 122.

⁶³ T. D. Kendrick, *The Druids*, London, 1927, p. 122.

⁶⁴ Waitz, *op. cit.*, II, 390.

⁶⁵ Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Le surnaturel et la nature dans la mentalité primitive*, Paris, 1931, p. 285.

tribal ancestors. Hence they are less protected, more exposed to all sorts of perils and to the evil influences which constantly hover about the group, ready to assail it ; in other words, they are ritually unclean."⁶⁶ Thus among certain tribes of Kenya the mounting of a child upon the marriage bed leads to ceremonial uncleanness requiring special purifications by a medicine-man or doctor.⁶⁷

On the other hand, it is an axiom in primitive thought that a taboo is transmissible, e.g., a mourner is quite as dangerous as the corpse he has touched. Everything which comes in contact with a tabooed person or thing becomes itself as dangerous as the original object, becomes a fresh centre of infection, a fresh source of danger to the community. A contact with what is holy or taboo makes a thing holy or taboo.⁶⁸ It is easy to understand that warriors about to march to battle are doubly susceptible to such supernatural contagion, hence the elaborate precautions taken to safeguard them from all supernatural influences deemed nefarious, hence the Gaulish taboo referred to by Caesar.

Let us now see whether, without going to the "savages," we may discern traces of a similar taboo among the civilized nations of antiquity. A charming story told by Cato and preserved by Aulus Gellius (*Noct. att.* I, 23) and Macrobius (*Sat.* I, 1. 18 ff.) seems to show that the Romans themselves once upon a time were familiar with this prohibition. It runs as follows :

Formerly boys under age, wearing the *toga praetexta*, were allowed to accompany their fathers to the Senate and to attend the sessions of that august body. On one occasion it was decided to keep the content of the deliberations strictly secret. This very fact stimulated to the highest pitch the curiosity of the wife of a senator whose son, Papirius, had attended that particular session. Accordingly she tried to wheedle out of her son the secret in question. The boy, not wishing to be rude to his mother, put her off with a story spun out of his own imagination. When the matter became noised abroad, Papirius frankly confessed in the Senate what he had done and his reasons for doing it. Thereupon the Senate highly commended him and passed a law that henceforth no boys wearing only the *toga praetexta*, i.e., boys under age, should attend the sessions, excepting Papirius, who for this reason was called Praetextatus, which in due time became a *cognomen* of that family.

From this story several conclusions may be drawn, to wit : (1) boys

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 286. Cf. F. B. Jevons, *An Introduction to the History of Religion*, London, 1896, p. 107, n. 4 : "Children are often considered taboo and therefore outside the community, until they grow up and are initiated."

⁶⁷ Frazer, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 61 f., 76.

under age were debarred from attending sessions of the Roman Senate,⁶⁹ (2) the reason of this prohibition was no longer known in historical times, (3) to explain this prohibition a story was invented which arbitrarily connected it with the *cognomen Praetextatus*.

Our story follows, of course, the familiar pattern of all aetiological tales : Boys under age are now debarred from attending sessions of the Senate. It was not always thus ; on the contrary, formerly they could and did attend. And then comes the reason (in the form of a story) why the custom was altered. But as frequently happens, the true character of the story is betrayed by its want of logic. For it does not say that any of the other boys had let out the secret, which indiscretion might have warranted the prohibition. As it is, one fails to see why this measure should have been taken at all, the boys having done nothing to justify mistrust.

On the other hand, it is impossible to say that minors were excluded on rational grounds. If such had been the case, the texts would say so, and the prohibition would have been extended to all persons which could reasonably be considered as "outsiders." But we know that even foreign ambassadors were admitted to the august assembly and allowed to be present at its deliberations. The fact that, as the story clearly indicates, boys under age are singled out tends to show that there was a special taboo at work which alone was responsible for their exclusion.

Nor is this a mere conjecture. Pliny (*N.H.* IX, 127), writing of the various uses of purple dye, says : "Fasces huic securisque Romanae viam faciunt, *idemque pro maiestate pueritiae est*. Distinguit ab equite curiam, disad vocatur placandis, omnemque vestem inluminat, in triumphali miscetur auro. Quapropter excusata et purpurae sit insania."

In this text the word *maiestas*, applied to *pueritia* "boyhood," clearly implies the ideas of potency, dignity and inviolability, in other words, the mysterious power thought to be inherent in boys prior to their initiation into the company of full-grown men, which in Rome was signified by the assumption of the *toga virilis*.

Nor is this all. Vergil, in one place (*AEn.* IX, 276) refers to Euryalus as *venerandus puer*, while in his *Culex* (26 and 37) he uses the word *sanctus* in referring to Octavius, who later became Octavianus Augustus.⁷⁰ *Sanctus*, in fact, might be used of any *praetextatus*, for well-born children

⁶⁹ The idea of boys of twelve upwards being admitted to the Senate House is justly ridiculed by Polybius (III, 20, 3) and clearly characterized by him as unhistorical.

⁷⁰ Fowler, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

(liberi) were all " holy ", in the religious-technical sense conveyed by the word, until they took the *toga virilis*. But the religious-technical sense of *sanctus* is virtually identical with the Polynesian *taboo*.

III

In his fifth book Caesar has drawn an interesting pen portrait of Dumnorix, a chief of the Aedui, " a man bent on revolution, bent on sovereignty, a man of great courage and of great weight among the Gauls." For these reasons Caesar was loth to leave him in Gaul while he himself embarked on his British expedition, for fear of having a rebellion start in his back. So he made up his mind to take Dumnorix and a few kindred spirits with him to Britain as hostages and to have them under his constant surveillance. To this proposal Dumnorix demurred (c. 6) :

Ille omnibus primo precibus petere contendit ut in Gallia relinquatur, partim quod insuetus navigandi mare timeret, partim quod religionibus impeditri sese diceret.

In other words, to prevail upon Caesar to leave him in Gaul he used two pretexts : (1) his fear of seasickness, which is clearly implied by the word *insuetus*, and (2) his being impeded on religious grounds. From (1) we may conclude that Dumnorix had really never crossed the sea into Britain ; for if he had it would probably not have been difficult for Caesar to ascertain the truth and to point out the hollowness of the pretext. From (2) it would follow that there was a religious taboo or prohibition against crossing the sea, either binding all Gauls alike or, more probably, since we know from Caesar, IV, 20, that there was a certain amount of intercourse between the continent and Britain, only Dumnorix's own particular caste. So we again turn to ethnology to discover whether such prohibitions exist elsewhere. For this we do not have far to look.

Speaking of the " magicians ", i.e. the priestly caste of the Persian and Armenian Mazdaist religion, Pliny (*N.H.* XXX, 6) mentions Tiridates, who received the crown of Armenia from Nero in A.D. 63 and who for this purpose betook himself to Rome, followed by a vast train :

The Magician Tiridates was at his (i.e. Nero's) court, having repaired thither, in token of our triumph over Armenia, accompanied by a train which cost dear to the provinces through which it passed. For the fact was, that he was unwilling to travel by water, it being a maxim with the adepts in this art that it is improper to spit into the sea or to profane

that element by any other of the evacuations that are inseparable from the infirmities of human nature. . . .

Some twelve centuries later, Marco Polo of Venice, speaking of the people of the Malabar coast, makes the following statements (III, 20, 3) :

These people abstain from wine made from grapes, and should a person be detected in the practice, so disreputable would it be held, that his evidence would not be received in court. A similar prejudice exists against persons frequenting the sea, who, they observe, can only be people of desperate fortunes and whose testimony, as such, ought not to be admitted.

This account of the mediaeval traveller is fully borne out by the sacred books of the Hindoos⁷¹ and by present-day observance. For although navigation existed among the Hindoos from of old and active trade was carried on with Indonesia, yet the natural disposition of the people is abhorrent to the sea ; nor can high caste persons embark on it without the risk of pollution, both in respect to contact and food, whatever precautions may be taken to avoid it.

Nor must it be supposed that the priestly taboo of salt water is peculiar to peoples of I.-E. speech : we also find it in ancient Egypt. To quote Plutarch (*de Is. et Os.*, c. 32) :

. . . the priests religiously keep themselves aloof from the sea, and call salt the “spume of Typhon” ; and one of the things forbidden them is to set salt upon a table ; also they do not speak to pilots, because these men make use of the sea, and gain their livelihood from the sea. This is also not the least of the reasons why they eschew fish, and they portray hatred by drawing the picture of a fish.

Porphyry (*de abst.* IV, 8 affirms that “to sail from Egypt . . . was considered by them (i.e., the Egyptian priests) to be one of the most unholy things.” But the Greek compiler failed to see the real import and *raison d'être* of the prohibition, interpreting it as a desire to keep aloof from foreign luxury and pursuits.

One objection will present itself at once to our hypothesis : Caesar himself (VI, 13) states that Druidism originated in Britain and that the Druids of Gaul used to go to Britain to visit famous schools and sanctuaries. Nor was Druidism less highly developed in Ireland. All this

⁷¹ In the *Baudhāyana* (II, 1. 2) we read : “ Now (follow the offences) causing loss of caste (patanīya), viz. making voyages by sea, stealing the property of a Brāhmaṇa or a deposit. . . .” Cf. *The Sacred Laws of the Aryans*, II (Oxford, 1882), p. 217. It is perhaps worth remarking that religious fanatics in general seem to have an aversion for the sea, witness Mohammed's dictum “ Men nezel' el-bahrā morreteyni f'kad kefer,” that is, “ He who twice embarks on sea is a very infidel.”

presupposes, of course, that members of the priestly class willy-nilly crossed both the English Channel and the Irish Sea. In rebuttal to this objection it is sufficient to state that the Brahmanic religion and civilization not only crossed the narrow sea which separates India from Ceylon, but penetrated into Java, Sumatra, and other islands of Indonesia, to reach which a considerable sea voyage was required.⁷² Nor is it possible to assume that the spread of Brahmanism could have been accomplished without Brahmans. It is also a matter of common knowledge that the prohibition mentioned by Plutarch and Porphyry did not prevent the Egyptian priests from crossing the Mediterranean and from spreading the cult of Osiris and Isis all over the Roman Empire :

Le Ciel défend, de vrai, certains contentements ;
Mais on trouve avec lui des accommodements.

Princeton, N.J.

⁷² Thus the island called *Dioscurides* by the Greeks bore the good Sanskrit name of *Dvipa suhatara* " happy island," whence the modern *Socotra*.